

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-07
L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15
USIA-06 IO-13 ACDA-07 /079 W
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FM AMEMBASSY DUBLIN
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9674
INFO AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMCONSUL BELFAST

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 DUBLIN 2312

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, UK, EI
SUBJECT: HARDENING OF PARTY POSITIONS IN NORTHERN IRELAND

REF: BELFAST 289

THE FOLLOWING TELEGRAM IS TRANSMITTED IN BEHALF OF
AMCONGEN BELFAST.

1. SUMMARY: CONVERSATIONS WITH NORTHERN IRELAND
POLITICIANS DURING A VISIT TO BELFAST BY THE IRISH
DESK OFFICER REVEALED A SIGNIFICANT HARDENING IN
POLITICAL POSITIONS THAT -- AT LEAST IN THE SHORT TERM --
SHOULD MAKE MORE DIFFICULT THE UK'S SEARCH FOR A POLITICAL
RESOLUTION ACCEPTABLE TO THE MAJORITY AND MINORITY
COMMUNITIES. SENIOR POLITICAL ADVISERS TO SECRETARY OF
STATE FOR NORTHERN IRELAND ROY MASON ACKNOWLEDGED THE
DIFFICULTIES BUT SAID THAT THEY WERE THINKING OF AN INITIATIVE
ON AN INTERIM DEVOLUTION OF POWER IN COMING MONTHS. END SUMMARY.

2. SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC AND LABOUR PARTY: A SPOKESMAN
WITH SOLID TIES TO THE RANK AND FILE, PADDY DUFFY,
CONFIRMED TO US OFFICERS THAT THE NEW SDLP POLICY
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DOCUMENT (REFTEL) WAS INTENDED FIRST TO PROTECT THE PARTY
FROM LOSSES TO EXTREMISTS -- I.E., THE PROVISIONAL IRA.
PARTY MAJORITY LEADERSHIP IN ADDITION SAW THE
RE-EMPHASIS ON THE "IRISH DIMENSION" AS A TACTICAL
MOVE BOTH TO ENCOURAGE BRITISH MOVEMENT ON POWER
SHARING, AND TO EXTRACT A BRITISH COMMITMENT TO EVENTUAL
WITHDRAWAL FROM NI. MINORITY LEADERS IN CONTRAST TOOK

THE RE-EMPHASIS AT FACE VALUE AS A PERMANENT PARTY LINE. DUFFY PERSONALLY FAVORED THE LATTER INTERPRETATION, BUT HE THOUGHT THE NEW EMPHASIS WOULD BE CONFIRMED BY A PARTY CONVENTION IN NOVEMBER AND WOULD NOT HIMSELF BOGGLE AT SDLP SUPPORT FOR A NEW POWER SHARING INITIATIVE.

3. UNIONISTS: OFFICIAL UNIONIST LEADER HARRY WEST DEMONSTRATED TO US NEAR TOTAL OBDURACY TO FURTHER EXPERIEMENTS WITH POWER SHARING. MAJORITY (UNIONIST) RULE WAS HIS CONSTANT REFRAIN. IN A SEPARATE TALK VANGUARD LEADER WILLIAM CRAIG SAID, WITH ONLY THE SLIGHTEST CONDITION, THAT HIS SMALL PARTY WOULD REJOIN THE UNIONIST FOLD IN COMING MONTHS AND HE EXPECTED STILL SMALLER SPLINTERS TO FOLLOW HIM IN.

4. ALLIANCE PARTY: AT A SEPTEMBER 25 PARTY MEETING, THE LEADER OF NI'S THIRD-RANKING PARTY RULED OUT AGREEMENT BETWEEN OR WITH THE TWO LARGER ONES. OLIVER NAPIER SAID THE OFFICIAL UNIONISTS LONG SINCE HAD MADE CLEAR THEIR LACK OF INTEREST IN AN AGREEMENT WITH THE SDLP, AND THE LATTER'S RECENT ACTIONS IN EFFECT WERE A REJECTION OF POWER SHARING. ALLIANCE IN TURN COULD NOT REACH AN AGREEMENT WITH EITHER ONE. NAPIER APPEALED TO NI'S THIRD, NONSECTARIAN TRADITION, WHICH "WILL BEGIN TO SHOW THAT ITS VOICE IS THE AUTHENTIC VOICE OF NI".
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 DUBLIN 2312

5. A BRITISH INTERIM INITIATIVE: SENIOR BRITISH OFFICIALS RECOGNIZED THE DANGER IN ALLOWING NI POLITICAL STALEMATE TO CONTINUE. THEY SAID MR. MASON HAD DECIDED AGAINST TAKING POLITICAL INITIATIVES DURING HIS FIRST YEAR IN OFFICE, SO THAT HE COULD GET THE SECURITY SITUATION UNDER CONTROL. APPARENTLY REFLECTING THE BRIEF FOR THE SEPTEMBER 28 CALLAGHAN-LYNCH MEETING, THEY SAID HMG IS NOW CONSIDERING POSSIBILITIES FOR AN INTERIM, PARTIAL DEVOLUTION OF AUTHORITY. IT MIGHT COVER SUCH MATTERS AS EDUCATION AND HOUSING. SUCH A SCHEME WOULD BE PROMULGATED BY WESTMINSTER AFTER THOROUGH SOUNDINGS IN NI. THEY WOULD EXPECT EACH PARTY TO CRITICIZE IT, BUT IN THE END TO PARTICIPATE.

6. COMMENT: WE FAIL TO SEE HOW THE SDLP'S NEW POLICY COULD PUSH THE UK TOWARD WITHDRAWAL. DUFFY WAS REFRESHINGLY FRANK, BUT WE WERE IMPRESSED THAT THE SDLP MOVE MAY HAVE CONSEQUENCES MORE SERIOUS THAN THE RISK OF SLIPPAGE TO THE IRA IT WAS INTENDED TO EVADE. THUS, THE UNIONISTS WERE CONFIRMED IN THEIR DISTRUST OF THE SDLP, AND ALLIANCE IS OFF ON A TANGENT. ANTAGONISMS AMONG THE PARTIES HAVE DEEPENED, CONFIDENTIAL

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AND A BRITISH INITIATIVE SEEMS AT LEAST MONTHS AWAY, IF INDEED PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS DO NOT SET IT OFF LONGER. SHANNON

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